

ASHA Berkeley



Site-visit report and commentary for Aseema's "Project Igatpuri"
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Project Igatpuri

Aseema's "Project Igatpuri" in Awalkheda is about creating balwadis & a schooling center, i.e. a series of endeavors to provide infrastructure, access, means & content for 'well rounded' pre-primary & continuing education to tribal children in & around the 'hamlets' of Awalkheda village in Igatpuri. These hamlets include: *Fanaswadi, Ambawadi, Jamwadi* etc.

Igatpuri is a small town located 200 km's NE from Bombay & 50 km's west of Nashik. Igatpuri is usually in the news for torrential rainfall (2nd highest in India), and amongst other things, spiritual getaways. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igatpuri>). Awalkheda, is the village 5 kms from Igatpuri 'downtown' - where the projects will be based.

Site visit overview

Background & Facts

Aseema has set up a *model* school ("balwadi") in Fanaswadi. I visited this center, to witness that it was professionally coordinated, clean, and had high quality content for the kids to learn. Food was provided to kids in the form of lunch/breakfast during the school hours. There are over 50 kids in the pre-primary and 40 kids in the primary sections (the number varies, depending upon parental willingness and the



co-ord's ability to "round-up" kids, however the variance is low.). The pre-primary section was operated in partnership with the local government authorities. The education provided here is mainly in Marathi. A big plus is that, it has high potential of being self-sufficient over the longer run, especially as the teachers are all local resources. They are

trained by city teachers in workshops but most of them are themselves residents of the “wadis” the kids are from. The concept of “education” has certainly caught on with the village elderly community – as the second small center in Ambawadi is on land donated by an Ambawadi elderly resident. Although there are other schools in the city, access to them is extremely strenuous as tribal kids have a long walk (on bad roads) and they are poorly maintained. In nearby hamlets there are poorly maintained government wadi’s.

Project/s

Although they are primarily looking for funding with the setting up the bigger center in Igatpuri (pic), they would also use the funds to create the small balwadi (pre-primary) in Ambawadi – which would be like the site I visited.

Goals & Aspirations

- a) Aseema wants to replicate the success of *Fanaswadi* in the other hamlet of Amabawadi. They’ve secured the land and location of a smaller pre-primary center and want to get going with this center by April 2007. The number of students expected would be around 40-60 and the student-teacher ratio is expected to be 20-30:1.
- b) Aseema proposes to establish a residential-cum-day education centre <exhibits a, b and c> to empower the children of Igatpuri to build a better tomorrow for their community:
 - The centre will be run by Aseema and initially accommodate approximately 150 children between the ages of 3 and 15
 - It will cater to underprivileged tribal children in Igatpuri and surrounding areas and will also be a home to some of the street children who are currently enrolled in Aseema’s Bandra Centre
 - Majority of the education will be vocational so that the children will become independent and will be able to support themselves once they complete their schooling. The content of teaching is primarily playgroup to primary (language, sciences, math etc) depending upon the age of the child.
 - The centre will include:
 - 8 Classrooms
 - 2 Vocational training rooms
 - Library/Study room
 - Hall
 - Kitchen
 - Prayer room
 - Health care room
 - Office and administrative area
 - Store room



- Land for agricultural development and playground
- Aseema is also in talks with renewable energy vendors in the silicon valley and Bangalore to provide solar powered technology to power their basic utilities like fan, lights etc

Needs & Enablers

Financing

The smaller center (balwadi) has a fixed cost of approx 18-20,000 rupees and marginal cost of 5000 rupees p.a. The other operating expenses run upto Rs. 15,000 a month (include salaries, food for kids, content etc)

The larger center would be broken in two phases, the initial set-up cost of Rs. 1,215,000 and second phase Rs. 3,140,000. (details of both are in the powerpoint attachment)

Staffing

Their model is to use local talent as teachers and provide them with timely workshops from montesorri and pre-primary experts (who're based out of Bombay)

Local government support

Political clout, as in any such endeavors will go a big way in securing a successful future. The government partly funds some aspects of the initial infrastructure costs as well. Ensuring a working relationship and “co-operation” from regional electives to villages panchayats will facilitate a smooth functioning.



Risks & Issues

Financing

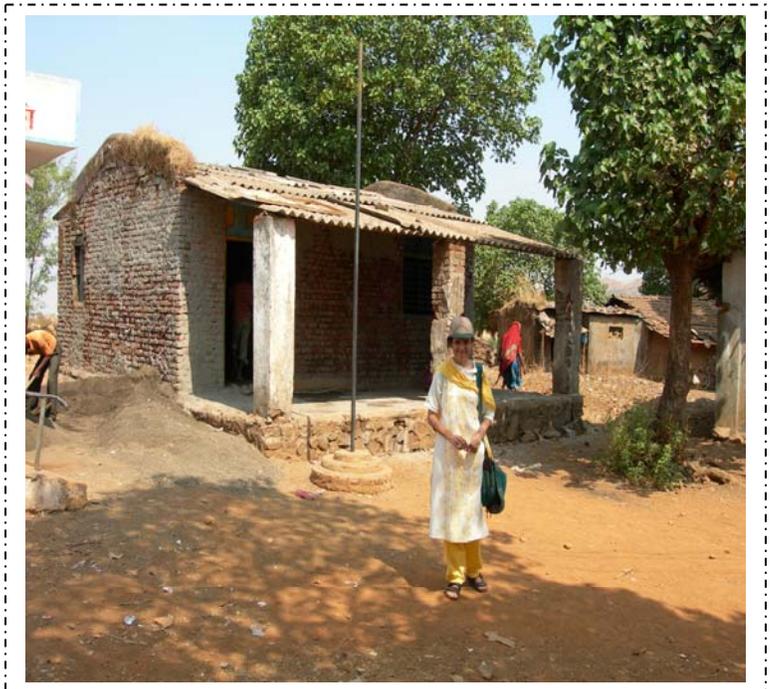
Pre self-sustainment financing would be a big issue for a few years initially.

Change management

Support from the parents of the kids, who for decades have been used to using children as child labor, to change their mindset and support them through years of school (albeit free education) is a significant change in the way they lead their life. However, Aseema's has succeeded in demonstrating that their model will slowly & steadily change these mindsets(ie. Fanaswadi et al)

Dilbur Parakh

Is the founder of Aseema – is an inspirational human being. However, a lot of Iगतपुरी's success would depend on her hands-on involvement in 'fighting' through everyday issues especially in the initial phase. She's ably assisted by trusted lieutenants – however as President of the organization, she has limited bandwidth. In conversations with her, she has indicated a willingness to relocate to the new center once it gets going. Such a move would go a long way towards ensuring the success & goals of self-sustainment.



Site visit logistics comments

From Bombay we took a private cab to Iगतपुरी, approx 3 hr journey. There are also trains from Bombay that bring you to the nearest station in Kalra. The road for the last 20-30 km's can be pretty unsettled. Once in Awalkheda, the terrain is hilly and there are no "pucca" roads between hamlets, but an SUV would do just fine. (Rickshaw's are also available for those who dare ☺). The entire trip can be easily completed in 12-14 hrs. An overnight trip is also a good option as they have meditation/yoga centers in the vicinity who have good food and infrastructure.

Aseema's background

After having spent time in Iगतपुरी and also Aseema's acquired BMC school in Bandra, Bombay, I have no doubts on Aseema's *ability to execute* – they are extremely efficient and creative in all projects they've taken on so far. They have high standards and their results speak for themselves. Their website is a good resource for info on their other initiatives, including a creative and cleverly managed product group that – converts art from students to revenue for the org. www.aseema.org . They have a great group of

advisers & trustees. (They recently won a best film award behest of APJ Kalam Azad for the animation movie: Raju & I – I'll be youtubing it after I obtain necessary approvals.).

There's no doubt that Awakheda's desperately needs Aseema and its amazing workforce. It desperately needs "Project Igatpuri" be a success, to help it secure a better & sustainable tomorrow. . .



Questions to Asha's team meeting minutes

1. Please separate information about the rural and urban schools in the form - if the funding request is for the rural school, please only include info on the rural school.

Ans: Funding request is for the rural school in Igatpuri

2. Specify the exact no. of schools that already exist in Igatpuri, and no. of teachers (govt. and Aseema)

Ans: 1 Balwadi exists, but the resources are not well directed or managed. 3 teachers (small balwadi) and 2-5 in the larger center

3. Specify in detail what is the relationship between the rural and urban schools - will teachers be traveling from Mumbai to Igatpuri, etc?

Ans: Local teachers, they are villagers who were able to get an education. Their skills are supplemented by workshop/training from Bombay based teachers

4. What is the current funding situation - how much has been raised, for what purposes and from which sources?

Ans: Funding raised from various sources including the local government. Specifics (above)

5. What stage exactly is the Igatpuri project at - pls. give details.

Ans: Initiation stage, land has been identified and bought, no construction yet.

Multimedia links:

1) Public gallery to all pictures: <http://picasaweb.google.com/hkisalso>

2) Videos

a) Children during class work:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CG2GC_MBCA

b) Children singing:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivIhS-ZFg6A>

c) Dilbur Parak describing the new site:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8I0bEdrTC8>

d) More children videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kND54VchALQ>

http://www.youtube.com/my_playlists?p=0CBE1DF28FAA5606

Exhibits:

3) Exhibits a, b, and c (the plans for the center)

